

## **Proposed Bill 648**

**February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

### **Veteran Testimony– Marjorie Rode, US Coast Guard, Retired**

I saw Victory Gardens at the Newington VA campus for the first time last Friday, while on my way to the VA medical center. I am a Veteran. And my career now is as a member of Chrysalis Center's Development team. I had before only had a vicarious view of Victory Gardens, as seen through photos or in reading the literature about the project. Seeing it live gave it a real sense of place.

The vicariousness of knowing tangentially about Victory Gardens without experiencing it in reality in some ways parallels my more than 21-year active duty Coast Guard career, from 1978 to 2000 ; where I was always part of the Coast Guard family at any duty-station, but was more of a visitor in the places I lived. Even after retiring, I didn't find a real sense of place in my own hometown for quite a while. I imagine that my experience as a Veteran, of not having a true sense of place is something all too familiar for many Veterans. Military service creates a sense of purpose, family, and adventure. Without this, Veterans often leave military service feeling ungrounded when they return to their civilian communities.

It is Chrysalis Center's hope that Victory Gardens shall become a permanent home, and create a real sense of place, to 74 Veterans and their families. This mixed income housing initiative will serve as a model of living inclusive of Veterans who might not be homeless, but who are reintegrating into their new civilian community with help from the Veteran's Administration, Chrysalis Center, and others who are involved in this project. The Victory Gardens model of housing is intended to create a place that nurtures the whole person; Mind, Body, and Spirit. It shall create stability for those who are newly employed, and those seeking employment. It will be a place of action, and a place of respite.

I can honestly say, as a Retired Active Duty Veteran, that finding a place I was willing to call home was not an easy task. It took me 10-years to find a career I was happy with after being part of the Coast Guard for so many years. Our Veterans need to feel grounded. Victory Gardens hopes to be a place for this to happen. You can support Victory Gardens by voting "Yes" on Proposed Bill 648.

As an afterthought, while I was waiting for my blood-work number to be called at the VA last Friday, other Veterans who were there waiting talked excitedly about the new housing being built on the property. "How could a person get to be a part of this?" they asked each other, and "When does it open?" It was great to hear this kind of excitement about Victory Gardens, from Veterans who had no idea as we were sitting there that I was part of Chrysalis Center. Again, please support Proposed Bill 648. Thank you.